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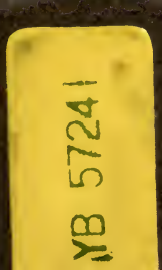
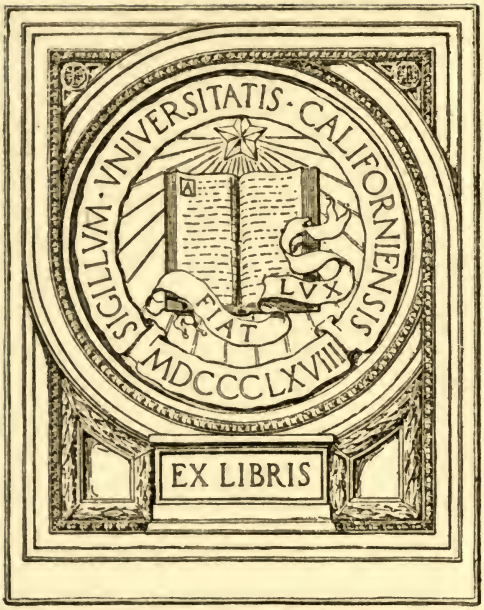
THE STRICKEN KING

BY

HORACE HOLLEY

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THE STRICKEN KING

THE STRICKEN KING

AND OTHER

POEMS

BY

HORACE HOLLEY

A. H. BULLEN
LONDON & STRATFORD-UPON-AVON
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BERTHA HERBERT HOLLEY.

CALIFORNIA

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

To

LILLIAN HOLLEY BAKER

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THE STRICKEN KING

To W. A. G.

I

O What am I that the cold wind affrays,
O What am I the ocean could confound,
A fort so open to the rebel days
And nature's mutiny and human wound?
O What am I so weak against the world,
Yea, weaker in my heart that should be strong,
On whom this double warfare is unfurled,
Of outer violence first, then inward wrong?
I am a fair, a fleeting glimpse of God
One moment visible in mortal state,
A bit of heaven caught i' the prison-clod,
That I nor nature's self may violate;
Ev'n as a jewel lost from kingly crown
That 's royal still, though fingered by a clown.

II

When I do see our human nature stained
Like lovely garments trailed upon the ground,
In tenement and palace alike constrained
To ominous forms that do my soul astound;
At lust, at hate, at all the bestial shapes
Brutality or weakness may assume—
Thrice-savage tigers, thrice-despoiling apes
Nuzzling the world to one degraded doom—
Yet, at such monstrous purpose and design
I cannot lash my heart to righteous hate,
But murmur still, "O piteous world of mine,
Such love as maketh Christs, whenever fate
In some tremendous, God-appointed hour
Will let mankind disclose its native power!"

III

As you are wise, I ask you not to blind
Your radiant vision to my lack of worth,—
I would not have mere folly make you kind
O soul most admirable of all the earth.
I ask you only, put such blindness on
As dims the phrase but lights the meaning plain,
As sees the limbs but not the rags they don,
As hails the soul though shrunk away in pain.
O that is wisdom, friend, and worthy you,
More worthy than the world's shrewd-sharpened sense
That scorns the scripless begger for his due
And damns the sinner for his sin's offence.
The world, alas, forgets or never knew
That hate is blind and only love knows true.

IV

WHEN you perceive the world's prophetic soul
A prisoner grieving in the common mind,
His cloudy wings bereft of their control,
His arms downslack, his fiery vision blind;
O when you see him weep at women's eyes
Or hear his moan in children's tender breath,
Showing that purity in sinners' cries
As in the good man's decent gradual death;
Do you not wonder oft and seek with me
What power has brought this Lucifer so low
That every ditch bedaubs his brilliancy
And foulest huts on him their shadow throw?
For this the Bard invokes, in mournful rhyme,
The awful charity of death and time.

v

Too blind, you cannot see the general grief
Which voiceless you would keep from other minds,
Nor ever learn how nature craves relief
From one disease in men of many kinds.
O fool, how many fools must time consume,
Like you, grim wasted heroes, dumb and blind
Whose hiding spirits pent tremendous doom
On private stage close-curtained from mankind!
You're like an actor, fool, who argues blame
Upon the author's glad, adventurous pen
For every passion, garbling it with shame:
"Tears are for women, gravity for men."
Dear fool, your heart will tell if I am wrong,
Which is your Poet, silenced far too long.

VI

We of the world who shuffle to our doom,
Who dull with common lead the gold of time,
Despoiling where we may the tender bloom
Of all unworldly souls that rise sublime;
Still scourging wisdom nobler than our use
And scorning pity bent on our despair,
Fouling earth's seldom beauty by abuse
In rage at strength too strong, at fair too fair;
Nathless we suffer pain with them we slay,
And more than they, as we their death survive.
Weep not for them so glorious in decay,—
Weep thou for us, inglorious and alive:
Stricken ourselves in their destruction, till
That inward Saviour come we cannot kill.

VII

"O Circe-world," I cried, "who can beguile
Glad youth to ruin, age to weak despair,
Dressing with fresh deceit each mortal mile
To coil our soul with more delusive snare,—
Discovered wanton, lovely though you be
Your lust shall never spoil my healthy years
While I, a life forewarned, can labor free,
Untainted by the world's repentent tears."
—But now, alas, the world on every side
And time's scarred reign confirmed within my heart,
The closer, sadder truth disarms my pride:
This same world's I, and I of it am part.
"Poor Circe-world," I moan, "whose honey bane
Ourselves do mix, do proffer and do drain!"

VIII

AYE, like the slumber of a drunken god
Whose golden couch indecent revel mars,—
A strumpet Sin with mean, familiar nod,
A jester Ruin havocing the stars;
O even as a mad, unpurposed dream
Distorting beauty in a fallen mind,
Wherein pass on, like wrecks upon a stream,
The sad procession of our humankind;
Ev'n so to me this troubled world appears
Whose fairest passion still of pain is bred,—
A radiant vision spoiled by shameful tears,
Or anxious god complaining on his bed:
"What sunless vineyard soured this Comus
wine—
O why such folly in a soul divine?"

IX

O LET us, like the bitter dregs of wine
That stood too long undrunken in the bowl,
Spill out this barren love that, once divine,
So vigorous brimmed the world's aspiring soul!
Man 's not that beggar, sure, that he must drain
The acid vintage of a broken press
Nor dull his heart with unconsoling pain
That craves by nature joy and lustiness?
Ah no! but rather say you never loved
Nor knew, O world, the passion of delight,
Else you by such a cheat were never moved,
But discontented soon would set it right.
For he who truly loves will love again,
Though on the cross and scourged by jealous men.

X

It were a foolish king, indeed, to show
A regal brow and sceptre to the gaze
But let his robe be muddy-dragged below,
And think to rule respected all his days;
For soon his court will scorn such monarchy
Nor call him king who is not wholly royal,—
The mean will grin, the reverent cease to be
Respectful subjects, in their heart disloyal.
Yet man is so, who should the world o'ersway
And hold eternal kingdom of the deep,—
His own deceit has scared respect away,
By birth a king, by act a chimney-sweep.
His sceptre would become him like a star
If inward greed did not its glory mar.

XI

YET, longer dwelling in that ruined court
Where man, the stricken king, so ill does reign
I find his folly wiser than report
And his defilement daughter of his pain.
He 's like a king who never knew repose
But lives in constant dread to be o'erthrown,
Buying a half-obedience from his foes
And half-a-king to them who would have none.
And so his robe is stained, his front dismayed,
His court a mock, himself but half a king;
And so his magnanimity 's arrayed,
So foully gowned, a self-impeaching thing.
'Tis so his royalty would be a scorn
If it were not too piteous and forlorn.

XII

HIMSELF his foe and bitter regicide,
Himself the faction risen in his state,
Himself his spy and minister, to chide
Himself to wrath, and nourish his own hate;
Himself his fool that can himself beguile,
Himself his scullion, foul to that degree,
Himself his beggar, skilled in cunning wile
Himself to plead in his necessity;
Yet king withal, and proved by future act
When all that baser self he may resign,
Leagued with himself and firm in his own pact
To live a monarch, noble in his line!
A king withal, and nowise made more clear:
His knavish self his lordly self does fear.

A LANDSCAPE IN NEW ENGLAND

THE sudden lights of sunset fall.
I tire, and pausing, turn to lean
Upon a weather-dampened wall
That bounds, like sleep, the dreamy scene.

Before me, worn, a pasture lies
And careless, truant breezes blow
Puffing, from gusty April skies,
The feeble grasses as they go.

A swollen brook, half-underground,
Its hidden voice now clear, now still,
O'erflows the world with droning sound
Like elfin throats beneath the hill.

To bearded hills the pasture runs
And orchard-slopes of twisted trees,
That, warmed in vain by austere suns,
Huddle in patient agonies.

A Landscape

I see a pillar, ashen-gray,
Fallen upon the hillside lone . . .
And yearn, as though my father lay
Beneath that unremembered stone.

The mossy wall has chilled my hand,
A fresh wind drives the clouds to foam;
The day's dim embers light the land,
And light a house no more a home.

The roof-tree sags, the gables flare,
A locked door trembles to the wind;
The broken oriels darkly stare
Like empty sockets of the blind.

But more than blind, old house, alas,
No inward being warms your breast
And never feet those chambers pass
Save Time's, the last, the saddest guest.

Ah, more than weak and blind and dark,
Like hearts in failure and disgrace,
You, full of death and ruin, mark
A sadder grave, that hold a race.

Beneath the gradual stars I wait,
A watchman stationed in a dream.
My thoughts, like prophets moved by fate,
Lament destruction, then redeem.

"O God!" within my heart I cry:
"Man fails, the lands their harvests cease,—
No lonelier hill implores the sky,—
Yet here is beauty, here is peace."

Here, from our broken human mold
An austere spirit floats abroad
And decks with reverent faith this old
Forgotten breathing-place of God.

INNOCENCE

I WEARY, looking on the sky;
I sadden, dreaming of the world,—
No star but points in enmity
The pit where I am hurled.

In time and space, where'er it seeks,
My thought unbars no tranquil room,
For beauty, once so gentle, speaks
A judgement and a doom.

Yet on my hot, averted face
Like friendly, pleading hands I find
A calm, and reassuring grace
From passive depths of mind.

The hopeless thief on Calvary,
Meeting the Saviour's conscious eyes,
Might know an inward sanctity
The common world denies.

THE LOVELESS

Me not despise, who when the jocund spring
With lusty passion brims the eager clod;
Me not despise, who, lone-forgotten thing,
Hold up an empty goblet to the god.

EPIGRAM

Forget the graves of heroes and no more laurel give
Or raise ten thousand more, which every day renew;
So many lives are lived by those too sick to live,
So many deeds are done by those too weak to do.

LINES ON A DAY OF SAD OMEN

My thoughts are barks the wind has blown
On desolate, unhappy seas
Which men in dread have left alone
For slow, unholméd craft like these.

Uncargoed of earth's labored plan,
Its endless and consuming strife,
They rest, unknown to mortal man,
On old, unhappy wastes of life.

In tideless waste between the lands
Incessant breezes lay the foam
And overcast, with pallid hands,
The ancient tracks that pointed home.

THE STORM

How wild the night! How wild the will!
The sullen skies contract to black
And all the cope of heav'n is shrill
With hurricane and thunder-wrack,

And o'er the scared and cowering lands
The reckless armies of the blast
Fulfil ten thousand mad commands
Before they sheathe the blade at last.

They shatter old, patrician trees,
They stem the torrent in its bed,
They plow the barren, tumbled seas
And plant them with the pallid dead;

They gather o'er our city streets
Where men are huddled close in pain,
And loose, from hidden, far retreats,
The lightning and the driven rain.

They shake the ancient towers of kings,
They pause to snatch a diadem,
They rouse the anarchy of things—
Only the prisoner smiles at them!

With wilder hate, with madder boast
They seize the underworld's allies
And marshalling its fiery host
Attack the fortress of the skies.

In vain! In vain! The gods awake,
Girding themselves in mild alarm,
When soon the sun's bright chariots break
The jealous league of night and storm.

How fair the dawn, how calm the will!
The soul looks out upon the day,
And all its earnest passions thrill
In sudden gladness to obey.

THE POET

His soul a hid desire obeys
Which, like daedalian wings,
Impels him from the prison-maze
Of customary things.

I know not how or where, he said,
But from myself I fly
As leaves must when the tree is dead,
Wind-blown across the sky;

And rising from that barren home
In far, unconscious flight,
To planets of new joy I roam
And skies of larger light.

But when I tire and sink again
Within myself, he said,
It seems as if this world of men
Had risen from the dead.

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

O DOFF the wrinkled mask you wear,
This nature-motley, worn and old,—
Stand forth, in gaiety or despair,
Outside the dumb worlds we behold!

No more i' the silly seasons dwell
Grinning at time with satyr-face,
Nor frown from the cold citadel
You raised amid the voids of space:

Else, tired of this unfriendly mask
Our lives resent its stranger-gaze
And turn them to a worthier task,
An inward world of works and days.

IDOLATOR

I WANT thy presence ever nigh,
Thy love, thy beauty and thy grace;
Yet when I sought thou wert not by,
I prayed, but never saw thy face.

Within my soul thy glory burns
Serene, unchanging yet afar,
So bright its own thick shadow turns
Like chaos round a lonely star.

I asked of nature; everywhere
A footstep and a sign of thee,
Alas, too grand,—not mine to dare
Omniscience and infinity!

A little image I have made,
Behold, dear God, a tiny thing,
And I have hoped (but half-afraid)
Thou could approve its fashioning.

They may have right,—I do not know,—
Who throne thee in the tedious sky,
But O, dear God, I love thee so
I'd have thee ever small, and nigh!

THE LEAVES

Hoppity skip! the leaves are free,
Down the lane of the world they go
Farther and farther in wreathy blow.
Hoppity skip! but wait for me!

Truant all, that left the tree,
Heartless all, that left him so.
Down the lane of the world you go
Hoppity skip! but wait for me!

Whirling and curling o'er lane and lea,
Hoppity skip! in a huddled row
Racing all day the winds that blow,—
Free at last, but wait for me!

Over and over, mad with glee,
Drunk in November's tawny glow,
On to the edge where light is low,
Hoppity skip! but wait for me!

Elfin leaves, O wait for me!
Together before the wind we go.
The winds of the year behind us blow
Hoppity skip! untethered, free!

On up the tilted world go we,
Over the edge in the sun's last glow,—
Over and down,—and Night below:
"*Take us at last, the leaves and me!*"

DECEMBER IN ITALY

EARTH and man are now December's; hill to valley yields the light
Of the sun's pathetic embers dropped from his remoter flight.
Who foresaw the magic changes winter flings on lake and wood?—
Grander rise the mountain ranges, deeper throbs the forest mood,
Trees stand still with inward passion, waters pause and hold their breath
In a blind, prophetic fashion caught by dreamy sleep, not death.
Nature's central spirit trembles in an agony of rapture
Which her spring-pomp dim resembles but may never wholly capture.
Nay! nor birdsong nor bright blossom nor the mad delight of horses
Half reveal what through her bosom in this mating season courses,

When in secret caverns mingle heaven-sire and
nature-mother
And the farmost planets tingle with the love of each
for other.
Hence from every dim horizon creeps a thick and
early eve:
'Tis the earth's attempt to prison heaven's god ere
he can leave;
Hence the winter-dream of mortals, melancholy
while elate,
Baffled just outside the portals of the moated house
of fate;
Hence the gleam of wistful magic on the turning
of the days,
Hence the courage mild and tragic of our sympa-
thetic gaze.

HOLIDAY

TAKE dulling sleep away,
Too-anxious gods of labor!
We laugh to scorn your gifts of calm repose.
Bring rarer gifts than those,
The garland and the tabor:
Meadow and grove are bright with holiday!

O raise the wreathéd pole
In ancient, pagan fashion;
Summon the piper and the fiddler round
To wake with ardent sound
Our deepest, dumbest passion,
Silent too long in our devoted soul.

What though our bodies bow
Or earthward droop our glances?
These are but servants to our heart's desire,
Which catching secret fire
From songs and May-day dances,
The laggard limbs with eager grace endow.

Yea, every joy you give,
Each soul-intoxication,
Turns back the gathering tide of doubts and fears,
Restores our jubilant years
As by divine creation,
And frees the rhythmic powers by which we live.

LOVE

We do wrong to seek content
And a changeless, snug repose;
'Twas for mortal never meant:
While the spirit lives, it grows.

When you seem no longer strange
If I say *my love*, *my own*,
In that moment you do change
And I stand afar, alone.

Let us weave no golden tie!
We must come and we must go
Like the winged winds on high,
Like the sea's unlabored flow.

There is peril in our love;
You and I no witless flower
To our consummation move
In an idle summer hour.

Love 's a bridge across the deep
Where the tempests maddened roll
And the tameless demons leap
Lusting for the risen soul.

'Tis the truce of hate and wrong
Which the moments must renew,
Which by courage we prolong
And destroying, render true.

There is peril in our love!
Like the island wizard's elf,
Power of spirit it must prove
O'er the Calibans of self.

Fling thy banners high, Romance,
Sound thy trumpets loud and gay
For the triumph we advance,
For the peril kept at bay.

THE MIRROR

WITHIN a wondrous glass,
A wondrous, magic mirror,
I gaze and see my features nobler shown
Than I can dare to own,—
O nobler, fairer, dearer,
Which inward graces brighten as they pass.

How beautiful, how strange
To note so wondrous graces!
A queen might feel her sceptre cheaply sold
If she could thus behold
A glass wherein her face is
Beyond desire made fair by magic change.

Such mirrors no one buys,
But they may freely own them
Who rightly love, who gladly greet the time.
All these will have, sublime,
Their souls and features shown them,
Nobly renewed, within their children's eyes.

TO HERTHA

ESSENCES of old love I bring
To make the new love sweet;
O many an old and broken thing
Makes love complete.

What memories that buried lay
In graveyard of the past,
Take resurrection from this day,
Divine at last!

What whispers on what summer eves,
What worship overthrown,
What faith a loveless man believes
No more his own;

What scattered, hopeless dreams arise
And reign within my heart;
The union of what prophecies,
My love, thou art!

PRIMAVERA

THE bud whose joyous odour first
Fills April winds with wine,
As long in nature's heart 'twas nursed
'Twas longer nursed in mine.

To every passion of the earth
And glamour of the spring
I give a spiritual birth
Transmuting everything.

The blush upon that rose demure,
Yon ripple o'er the sea,
This proudly-warbling robin, sure
Are only parts of me !

The rapture like a warming fire
That makes the year divine
Could only burn from love's desire—
Could only burn from mine.

Though nature show her ancient bill,
Boast loves of other years,
She brought no spring to me, until
I watered it with tears.

My heart has paid its winter, now
My heart acclaims its spring,
And life is like a barren bough
Where sudden blossoms cling.

Through winter-ways of grievous thought,
Up darkened paths of doubt,
My own, my rightful love I sought—
At last I find her out!

In drear indifference she passed
Like spring to prisoned men.
I never cared; I care at last;
She will not pass again.

The tender beauty of her face
I moulded from despair;
My sorrow crowned her inward grace,
My faith made her so fair.

As from a shining, golden bowl
Men turn the eager wine,
I poured the nectar of her soul
From this pure hope of mine.

From thence the spring and she arise,
Glad pilgrims of the earth,
Who vainly ask among the skies
The secret of their birth.

Roll on, inexorable year!
Take spring, take love from me:
The heart that finds fulfilment here
Demands eternity!

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SONNET, ON THE OCCASION OF A BIRTHDAY

I PRAY thee, Lord, for some great task to do
Full worth the years I wait beneath the sky;
Like Solomon, who reared thy temple high,
Or Milton, who the Heavenly Muse did sue.
E'vn this the prayer that I most oft renew
Urged on by eager thoughts that in me cry,
Blind voices, craving freedom lest they die,
At best their years of animation few.
O 'tis enough these bones shall turn to dust,
The clay pain hallowed in my mother's womb;
It is enough that earth keep them in tomb
And not the spirit which they hold in trust.
The living soul to highest labor must
Or lie with bones in unaspiring doom.

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